

Where are you going?

I remember my mother-in-law asking me that question? Although she had very little sight, she said she would like to go on a car trip to central London. As we passed famous places we gave her a running commentary. When we got in front of Buckingham Palace I drove round the roundabout slowly, not just once but twice and then three times. On the fourth time round she suddenly realised and said: "David, where are you going?"

In the journey of life it is so easy for us to find ourselves going round in circles, getting on with everyday life but with no overall direction. Jesus noticed this with the people he met. When he "saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Like sheep they wandered in circles or even the wrong direction. This is why Jesus calls us to follow him, to have a clear sense of direction in life, to set out on a journey of faith.

In our first reading we see a man whose life was going nowhere until God called him. His name was Abraham (Hebrews 11:1-16). Before the call of God he lived a comfortable life with his family in Haran, getting on with the everyday circle of activities but with no clear goal in life. If things had carried on like this we would have never heard of Abraham and the course of Jewish and Christian history would have been very different. But God spoke to Abraham and he obeyed. By faith he set out for the promised land, living in tents as he travelled following God's directions.

Looking at Abraham's life, we can learn three important principles for our journey of faith.

Faith never looks back

After Abraham left Haran he never went back. He left his property, his comforts, most of his household possessions, and even some members of his family. He didn't think of old life he had left behind but reached forward eagerly to his new life and the promised land ahead of him. There was no turning back.

At the age of thirteen I was baptised. During the service a godly man put his hands on my shoulders and gave me this verse from the Bible: "Forgetting the things which are behind... I press on towards the goal to win the heavenly prize for which God is calling us." Phil 3:14

I began my journey of faith at 13. Abraham began his journey of faith at 75. Whatever our age it is never too late to begin the journey of faith, to allow God to take us in a new direction.

Faith looks up to God with every step

Reading the full story of Abraham's life in Genesis, the thing that impressed me was that wherever Abraham stopped on his journey of faith to the promised land he built an altar and worshipped the Lord there. Throughout his travels he continually looked up to God and worshipped him.

It is good to build into our lives stopping places where we give thanks to God, whenever we celebrate an anniversary or a birthday, whenever we meet together with God's people, whenever we sit down to share a meal. These are all opportunities for worship.

We should not imagine for one moment that Abraham's travels all went smoothly. Our reading from Hebrews gives us the highlights but when we read the full story in Genesis we see all the difficulties that he faced. Abraham and his wife experienced the heartache of being childless for many years. They lived through times of famine and went through places where there was violence and evil. There was quarrelling in the family. Yet through it all Abraham continued to put his trust in God and worshipped him.

Faith looks towards its destination

Abraham believed God's promise and "he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Together with all people of faith he "desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16). This is what unites our hearts this morning. The important thing is not where we have come from but where we are going.

Looking around us this morning we see that we all come from different backgrounds, not just across the British Isles but across the world. Yet we are all citizens of heaven and that is our destination. Jerry Lee Lewis used to sing the song "This world is not my home I'm just a passing through." Faith keeps its eye on our final destination where we will not only be united, but also reunited with those who have gone before.

Abraham is the first person in the Bible to be called a Hebrew (Genesis 14:13). The original meaning of the word "hebrew" is uncertain but some scholars think it is linked to the idea of crossing over or passing through. What is certain about Abraham is that he was always looking beyond the world around him to the promise of a heavenly city.

True sons and daughters of Abraham

Abraham is a great example of faith. He never looked back to his old life, he looked up to God at every step and he looked forward to his final destination - the heavenly city. Jesus said that we too can be the true sons and daughters of Abraham.

When Jesus visited Jericho he came across a man whose life was going round in circles. He was preoccupied with making himself rich by gathering taxes and enjoying the comforts of life. When Jesus saw him hiding up a tree Jesus invited himself to a meal at his house. On that day Zacchaeus's life was changed. He had a new sense of direction and began his own journey of faith. He promised to give half his wealth to the poor and if he had cheated anyone to give them back four times what he owed. Jesus said "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham." Luke 19:9 NLT

You and I can be true sons and daughters of Abraham this morning as we begin or continue our own journeys of faith.

We all have different journeys.
Different paths along the way,
We all were meant to learn some things,
but never meant to stay...

Our destination is a place,
Far greater than we know.
For some the journey's quicker,
For some the journey's slow.

And when the journey finally ends,
We'll claim a great reward,
And find an everlasting peace,
Together with the lord

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka (weeping) they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion." Psalms 84:5-7 NIVUK